

IV

How the Mind Once Lived

OUR HUMAN FORAGING ANCESTORS who plunged onto the scene in the Pliocene/Pleistocene savannas, emerged from a mammalian ecology that had been under way for around fifty million years. Our particular way of seeing and reading the nonhuman and nonliving world around us evolved out of long-standing strategies of hunting, competing, and evading devised in these first mammals and their evolved prehuman forms. The niche open to these prehumans placed them in a network of open-country mammals whose mental capacities would become fossilized in the shapes and volumes of their craniums as they left their skulls buried in the earth. The human brain, as we progressed toward our human form, and unlike the brain of the prehuman ancestor and its mammalian contemporaries, would double in size (from 500 to 1,000 cubic centimeters from the genus *Australopithecus* to genus *Homo*)—and with this size came the capacity to outsmart other prey and predators on the savanna. Our mind came out of that long-ago scene and we owe its capacity to our ancient ancestors who faced, survived, and adapted to a challenging, rich, wild milieu that remains etched on our craniums like ancient paintings on cave walls.

The “game” we entered was a *trope* with paradigmatic roots in the animals whom we began to hunt and whom we believed to be sentient, intelligent, and spiritual. The game the mammals played among themselves, 51 hunter and hunted on an open playing board, was itself *trophic*, based on energy flow and food chains. This game of predation and survival was a long-standing matter of mutual pruning (over a long period of time, in terms of the minutest statistical advantage, perhaps on the order of 0.0001 percent per century) that favored the most swift, cunning, and discerning over those who were slow to catch on and flee.

All predation is a life-and-death game, but this one was different because open country and eye orientation enabled the thinkers to displace events in both time and space. Imagine, if you will, footprints washing away in a wet jungle, the forest dampening of sound, the hidey-holes that could do for a tactical escape without taxing cognition, and numbers of smaller prey, tiny parcels of protein, in the form of insects, rodents, or reptiles, that would reduce the necessity of a long search or chase. A bent tuft of grass, slowly raising its head, clocks the time since it was trampled; a distant call in known terrain says it is there, not the here, where attention should be paid. In open terrain, big mobile prey can escape easily and dangerous predators may be forced to strategize from a distance.

A dozen species of large carnivores and an equal number of powerful ungulates played at this game through the veldt and grasslands for sixty million years. As genera they came and went like substitutes on a playing field, losing place as their competitors or their prey upped the intellectual ante. Because of little neural connections, our ancestors were well ahead of most of their kinfolk in the swamps, brush, and forest in terms of discerning the relationships between clues: the color of droppings, the presence of blood, the body language of a pregnant or nursing female, the intentionality of lions, and a thousand other important events that occurred around them.

The game had already started, and we newcomers came to it with our bumptious primate scuffling, our chimpanzee-sized brains, our social preoccupations, and a growing taste for meat. Our ancestors literally walked into this ongoing play in the savannas like naive young things seeking success on the New York stage. But they brought with them the venerable skills of primate scheming, intrigue, and an arboreal and social agility that had characterized simians for millions of years. It did not take us many millions of years to become competitive. There were important advantages we brought along or perfected: bipedality, larger size, the hand, and, of course, that calculating brain already bigger in ratio to body size than most mammals possessed.

At some point learning by imitation was transcended by the unique human capacity to reason abstractly. This ability may have arisen in the course of hunting. Detecting the presence of unseen animals by the calling (or “scolding”) of other animals or birds would be such a knack, or reading visual tracks, which is among the most subtle and demanding of human abilities. And there were other clues: the smell of urine, the age and composition of dung, the drying of bitten stems, or the overall pattern of footprints and traces in a day’s experience. Escalated into a year’s experience, animal migrations could be anticipated by the signs of plant phenology, the phases of the moon and sun, and the changing sounds of the year.

Our ancestors undertook what the chimpanzees never got around to: catching big, dangerous things to eat, things bigger than themselves. The need to cooperate in order to accomplish such a task was probably not apparent at once: it may have grown slowly out of mutual scavenging that required occasional support against competing scavengers or predators returning to claim their kill. This mutual scavenging took place in mixed open country, where the florescence of grasses and their seeds made possible the great herds of ungulates, and they, in turn, entertained a world of carnivores in a slow dance of mental synergism, each taking its cue from the other.¹ Back and

forth the predators and prey, including our forebears, tested each other's brains across aeons of successes and failures, always subject to the law that even in evolution you can never do only one thing.

Imagine a dramatic spectacle on a continental scale: a proscenium of grassland and park, in which the players come and go masked as a succession of species, all obedient to the central theme: a banquet at which the participants—eater and eaten—risk the improvements of mind against the certainty of occasional poor decisions, faulty memory, carelessness, errors of judgment, and the decrepitude of age and disease. The overriding rule was simple: the catcher had to be smarter than the caught, but not much and not always. Those who fled had to understand the limits of distance, the intentions of the others, and the ability to control the abyssal terror that itself would engulf them if they submitted to panic.

Out of this immense drama among dozens of species of big mammals, herbivore and carnivore, came brains, mind, memory, and strategy—spontaneous and conscious. Those other savanna species who hid in trees or went underground became peripheral, not to the ecology of the whole, but to its mega-chessboard. Masters of the grasslands and parks, early humans were not. But with a single round of brain cell doubling beyond that of the chimpanzee, they took cognition and communication far enough to find a niche among the faunal cognoscenti like gifted “red-shirt” freshmen making the team.

They learned the open-country craft of the hunter and the cunning of the prey, for they were the stalking, tracking predator, the wary, elusive victim, and a passing opportunist in a reciprocity not only between hunter and hunted but within the group and, eventually, aspects of the self. The less direct consequences of our participation in the game were not just survival skills but the whole panoply of social forms that came to be typical of the primal foraging human groups. Out of their peculiar vulnerability, their proclivity for seeking rock shelters, and their strong primate instincts for communication came the selection of a genome for thinking out events. Group size, growth rates, ontogeny, male/female relations, and the social imperatives of leadership—all were indirectly shaped by the game.

AT THIS POINT in the growth of mind it became fully human and brought into play various complex forms of cognition: the pantomime, the mimicked reference, sharing the idea of an animal by imitating its calls, the way it kicks, stamps, tosses its head, or ritually fights its own kind in stylized performances. A huge repertoire of human communication must surely have grown from this activity, including references made to each other symbolized by types of animals or the pantomimes and gestures in which hands trace forms in the air, keyed to sounds that were not merely mimic. “Sign language” began with conventional signals, just as alphabets began with glyphs. And perhaps out of gesture came the drawn form, just as dance came from the pantomimes. Such gestures were extrapolated even to the sky, so that a constellation or a group of clouds might be “read,” or told and come to play their own role in the illustration of narrative. The afterthought was twin to the forethought: from narration of the past, to the articulated plan, to the formulated strategy of the hunt to be. “Savage thought,” says Claude Lévi-Strauss, “is definable both by a consuming symbolic ambition such as humanity has never again seen rivalled, and by scrupulous attention directed entirely towards the concrete.”² To which W. E. H. Stanner, who has studied Australian Aboriginal history, religion, and ways, adds: “If one wants to see a really brilliant demonstration of deductive thought, one has only to see a blackfellow tracking a wounded kangaroo, and persuade him to say why he interprets given signs in a certain way.”³ Lévi-Strauss rescued the “savage mind” from the idea that it was childish and stupid. Rather, he identified within it the feature of timelessness, an affinity of all present events with past events.

Stanner describes Aboriginal thought as a “metaphysical gift,” an idea of the world as an object of contemplation, a lack of omniscient, omnipotent, adjudicating gods, in a world without inverted pride, quarrel with life, moral dualism, rewards of heaven and hell, prophets, saints, grace, or redemption—all

this among blackfellows whose “great achievement in social structure,” he says was equal in complexity to parliamentary government, a wonderful metaphysics of assent and abidingness, “hopelessly out of place in a world in which the Renaissance has triumphed only to be perverted and in which the products of secular humanism, rationalism and science challenge their own hopes.”⁴ His contemporaries must have thought Stanner had “gone native” and left his critical intelligence in the outback. Among primal peoples, observes anthropologist Dorothy Lee, who studied Native American perceptions, there is a “non-linear codification of reality” in which space is not defined by distances on a uniform scale.

The lines linking points are not mathematically perceived like the typographic lines in a book; it is a world without tense or causality in language, a world where change is not a measured becoming but a new areness; it is a journey, not a passage through, but a revised at-ness.⁵ It is “an event world,” signified by sound, says Walter Ong, created from interiors rather than surfaces, returning the hearer always to the organic paradigm, life, the body as the source

of sound.⁶ It is a world, says Bogert O'Brien about the Inuit, where the transience of objects is their foremost quality and one "does not depend on objects for orientation. One's position in space is fundamentally relational and based upon activity. The clues are not objects of analysis. . . . The relational manner of orienting is a profoundly different way of interpreting space. First . . . the environment is perceived subjectively as dynamic, experiencing processes. . . . The hunter moves as a participant amidst other participants oriented by the action."⁷

Humans, as Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt tells us, are hunter/gatherers, irrespective of the cultures that can sometimes obscure and distort what they truly are.⁸ As a special case of this sense of the fluidity of motion in time and place, consider the tradition of running among many Native Americans, a hint of worldwide traditions, mythically and cosmologically integrated, drawn undoubtedly from the esthetics of the chase. Running had "magical ends" and "mystical purposes," including "trance running" or "skimming" in "the hummingbird way."

Peter Nabokov describes the "extrasensory perception of the trail" as though it moved under the runner, a special way of "trusting the earth."⁹ To spiritualized running one might add nightwalking, which has been explored recently as a way of developing the capacity to see in the dark by training the skills of peripheral vision.¹⁰ Night vision depends on the non-color-sensing (rod cell) parts of the retina surrounding the central (cone-cell) area of keen vision where

we focus the images we "look at." By walking at night without looking at the trail (deliberately inhibiting the central area vision) we develop the peripheral field, mediated by the rod cells. Through this exercise we achieve a new level of nocturnal sensibility as well as more acute perceptual abilities. If peripheral information feeds directly into the unconscious, as some believe, we may enhance access to our unconscious by such nocturnal skills as nightwalking. The rational, objective world, which occupies most of us each day, usually overrides the nonrational and unconscious world—which, when neglected, intrudes, disrupts, and overturns our logical mind. In the world of the forager, this was not an issue since the rational and nonrational functions of the brain were balanced and acknowledged. They could see in the dark as well as discern the dark underside of human consciousness.

THE COMPLEX MENTAL PROCESSES involved in foraging are worth looking into in more detail. A sort of venatic phenomenology occurs when primal peoples interpenetrate the nonhuman world in an extraordinary achievement of toolmaking, intellectual sophistication, philosophy, and tradition. As a result, says Lévi Strauss, "in a world where diversity exceeds our mental capacity nothing is impossible in our capacity to become human."

The "savage mind" grasps the world in a totality of present and past with all its multiplicity and complexity. On the other hand, as Lévi-Strauss has revealed, civilized thought attempts to simplify rather than clarify the complexity of the world. It does so by unifying and seeking continuity, variability, and relativity rather than by conceptualizing new schemes, as does "savage" thought, that then become additional objects to be comprehended. Stated simply, the "civilized mind" attempts to simplify and level the world whereas the "savage mind" is not afraid to become enmeshed in its complexity. Birth and death provide the material for a rich and diverse conceptualization [such as initiation ritual] . . . which transcends the distinction between the real and the imaginary." It may seem that primal thought with its spiritual depth is not scientific, but Lévi-Strauss regards such thought as "a science of the concrete." He says: "The manner in which primitive peoples conceptualize their world is not merely coherent but the very one demanded where objects are discontinuous and complex." In treating plants and animals as elements of a message, primitive thought discerns "principles of interpretation whose heuristic value" is only recently matched in our society by telecommunications, computers, and electron microscopes and modern information theory. "The entire process of human knowledge," he concludes, "thus assumes the character of a closed system . . . The scientific spirit . . . contributes to legitimize the principle of savage thought and to reestablish it in its rightful place."¹¹

A widely shared theme among primal peoples is that of the life of the animal soul. Among prehistoric foragers, as among the !Kung San today, animals were the principal actors in cosmology, a theriomorphic society engaged with humans in a vast play, the theme of which was the reciprocity of killing and renewal, the unity of eater and eaten. The human task was to discover social themes coded in nature and cataloged as taxonomy, told as stories and danced to the rhythms of animal-skin drums.

Memory is central to hunting and gathering, and brain size is directly related to memory. Memory becomes more important the bigger and more dangerous the game, the more helpless and far-traveled the gatherers. Memory is also extremely important to gatherers as they range across home terrain extracting from plants and earth. Moreover, they develop an uncanny vigilance, a softness of presence for which prey species are noteworthy, the ability to become inconspicuous, unnoticeable, such as is seen in a bird collecting food for its nestlings.

Hunting big animals, as noted earlier, requires a kind of timed cooperation that necessitates planning. Richard Borshay Lee's book *The !Kung San* describes the preliminary dialogue and deliberation between hunters before they

commence the hunt: the lengthy discussion of the rains, the state of grazing in different localities, the significance of recent sightings. Hundreds of hours per year go into such verbal colloquy and considerations, a discussion that includes women. The dialogue continues to unfold from the preliminary discussions to the hunt itself and after. When tracking, the !Kung San note birdcalls and signs and discuss the spoor.. Tracks tell the species, age, sex, speed, and physical condition of the animal and whether it was accompanied by other animals, what it was feeding on, and when it passed. Since tracks change over time, the !Kung San develop “their discriminating powers to the highest degree,” estimating how far ahead the animals are. The hunters read the dung and watch for bits of the foliage dropped from the animals’ lips while eating. They appraise the size of a herd, whether it has been seeking shade, resting, or halting to feed. The stalking of a wounded animal opens new and repeated discussions and decisions.

During overnight stops the hunters observe specific taboos in a ritually heightened state. Access to the spirits by hunters—ancestral, demonic, plant or animal—is not unusual and can be undertaken in prayer, supplication, dream, trance, visionary disembodiment, and ecstatic flight to the other world. This spiritual state leads to a deeper insight into the meaning of the hunt, the chancy character of the game that may lead to a loss of the hunter’s life, and the ethical implications of taking other lives. No hunter on record has bragged that he is master of his fate and captain of his soul. Generally humans have been in the humble position of being few in number, sensitive to the seasons, with an admirable humility, respect, and spiritual connection to the universe. Hunting is, both in an evolutionary sense and individually, says C. H. D. Clarke, “the source of those saving instincts that tell us that we have a responsibility towards the living world.”¹²

Storytelling and ritual ceremonies before or after the hunt enhance the spiritual aspect of the hunt. Animal masks in rites give palpable expression to transitional states. On the body of a person the animal mask joins that which is otherwise separate—not only representing human change but conceptualizing shared qualities—so that unity in difference and difference in unity can be conceived as a pervasive truth. And some animals, by their shape or habit, such as foxes and frogs, are also boundary creatures who already signify the threshold world of human passages. In dance and song, bodies, painted and adorned, move to deep rhythms that bind the world and bring the humans into mimetic participation with other beings and the truth of the multiplicity of all domains.

The most erudite essay on hunting, ancient or modern, is José Ortega y Gasset’s *Meditations on Hunting*. His emphasis is on the authenticity of the generic way of being human. He conceives the hunt in terms of a degree of validity of human experience in its direct dealing with the inescapable and formidable necessity of killing. He also refers to the hunter’s ability to “be inside” the countryside, by which he means the natural system: “Wind, light, temperature, ground-contour, minerals, vegetation, all play a part; they are not simply there, as they are for the tourist or the botanist, but rather they *function*, they act.” Ultimately, this function is balanced by the reciprocity of life and death. Because the mystery of death and that of the animal who comes and goes are the same, “we must seek his company” in the “subtle rite of the hunt.” In all other kinds of landscape, he says—field, grove, city, battleground—we see “man travelling within himself ” and outside the larger reality.¹³ A biologist turned philosopher/historian, Ortega y Gasset regards “primitive” hunter/gatherers as true progenitors of ourselves in the best sense and believes that we realize our true heredity in the hunt.

As noted in earlier chapters, in non-Western, un-industrialized, and largely illiterate (hence nonhistorical) societies, power is plural, societies are egalitarian, and leadership is not monopolized but changing and dispersed. Although there may be said to loom a single creative principle behind it all, in polytheistic worlds there is no omniscience and no single hierarchy, no top-down authority that frames what one is to believe and how one is to live. And still these people have a beautifully fluid yet stable culture that remains intact through climatic and other earthly mishaps. The cement that bonds primal peoples internally and inextricably—the paradigm and exemplar for this social discontinuity among human groups—is the array of natural species about them.

Animals and plants are regarded as centers, metaphors, and mentors of the different traits, skills, and roles of people. Insofar as they model diversity and the polythetic cosmos, the animals provide analogs to the multiplicity of stages and forms; they are interlocutors of change that is brought ceremonially into human consciousness. The foragers’ world is rich in signs of a gifting cosmos, a realm of numerous alternatives and generous subsistence, not so much to be controlled by humans as to be understood and affirmed and joined.¹⁴ The original chancy game of prey and predator, of eating or being eaten, takes on a more significant meaning in a gifting world where chance is still an element: the only question is when the gift will pass on. Hunter/gatherers know nature well enough to appreciate how little they know of its complexity. They are engaged in a humble play of adventitious risk, which is hypostasized in gambling, a major leisure-time activity. Gambling is, after all, miniaturizing the game, depicted in the bodies of beasts, lounging or in repose, the ravishing mystery and fun of being a counterplayer, of moving and being moved in

the excitement of the chase, the stillness of its sacred aftermath, and the joy of retelling. The great game of chance is elaborated in foragers' myths rich in the strangeness of life with its unexpected boons and encounters, its unanticipated penalties and rewards, not as arbitrary features of supernatural visits but as infinitely complex affiliations.

NOT ALL SEARCHES AND QUESTS are hunts, for the hunt deals with the intense emotional and philosophical problems raised by the act of killing and of facing one's own death. It is not a problem for us simply as predatory carnivores, but as the occasional prey, and as an omnivore whose closest kindred species are also omnivorous, conscious, sentient beings like ourselves. It is right to kill and be killed in this "game" of the hunt so long as we understand the transformations of life and death as a natural consequence of the gifting cosmos where one receives and gives and in the final hour finally passes the gift on. When that clarity is lost the hunt becomes monstrous, along with the rest of nature, and we remove the killing to a butcher's abattoir.

Gathering and hunting are the economic basis of an intricate cosmology in which epiphany and numinous presence are embodied and mediated by wild animals, plants, mountains, and springs. Thinking is toward harmony in a system where people disturb nature so little that its interspecies parities seem to be more influenced by intuition and rites than by physical actions. The hunter's concept of the universe—which Stanner called "the dreaming," also a cosmogony—describes how the universe became a moral system and consists of three elements: marvels, species diversity, and institutions. Marvels refer to that presence of the unexpected that one always encounters sooner or later in nature, particularly when the terrain reflects something about the mind that implies a common structure. His second element, species diversity, coincides with one of the major moral issues of our time—the extinction of species and reduction of biodiversity. Moral issues hinge on real functions, and Stanner has rediscovered what the blackfellow built into his ethical system: that taxonomy is the basic key to human cognition, that thought and speech depend on categories prior to all else, and that morality depends on this as well. If this is so, it makes one wonder how our treatment of each other will change as species are destroyed and diversity is reduced.

As for the third element, institutions, they are what humans create most successfully, based on stories of origins, as analogies to the structures that bind the species into marvels of affinity. These are the keys to reality, revealing how things are, what is known, and how to behave. Tales are a commentary on the underlying principles, a model of morality. Archaeologists Peter J. Ucko and G. W. Dimbleby say: "Some groups of Australian aborigines, despite their extremely limited natural resources and their basically 'Stone Age' technology, have devised one of the most complex of metaphysical systems of belief held by any human group."¹⁵ This cosmogony—how the universe became a moral system—is nothing like an Athenian skeptical philosophy but is a continual, visionary, intuitive, poetic understanding, an ahistoric abiding. There is no quarrel with life. Their metaphysic assents to what men have to be because of the way their life is cast.

The cosmography of tribal peoples is marked by a degree of humility toward the natural world that is lacking in civilized society. Among the principles of the Koyukon worldview, as described by anthropologist Richard Nelson, are these two: "Each animal knows way more than you do" and "The physical environment is spiritual, conscious, and subject to rules of respectful behavior."¹⁶ The worldwide rules of the "sacred hunt" have largely to do with the metaphors that arise as an affirmation of the food-chain structure of nature. Humans are free to create lives and societies according to whatever ideals or fantasies suit them. Huichol yarn paintings of Mexico are visual evocations of stories that integrate the human and nonhuman in dazzling, sophisticated webs, uniquely beautiful works of art and tradition and yet consistent with the cosmologies of Australian Aborigines, African Bushmen, and many tribes of American Indians.

Peoples living at the mind-testing limits of the earth especially express anxiety about the necessary appeasement that is always a part of ceremonies of the hunt. "The greatest danger of life," they say, "lies in the possibility that human food consists completely of 'souls.'"¹⁷ Among the Ainu of Japan, anadromous fishing and shellfish collection are treated culturally like gathering while whalekilling resembles the practices of largegame hunting sustained in myth and ceremony.

Peter Matthiessen writes: "In traditional hunting land and life belong to every member of a community. Greenland's mute sea ice and empty land are not an 'environment' in the Western sense—a human 'habitat' to be exploited. They are the ground of a hard life and the realm of memory and cultural renewal, providing a sense of continuity and tradition which lies at the heart of Inuit well-being. Hunting is the vital nerve of Inuit existence."¹⁸

EVIDENCE OF A MOTHER GODDESS deity in ancient cultures continues to be of interest in our modern society.

Psychoanalysts sometimes argue that sacred maternal imagery corresponds to the visual experience of the newborn. Archaeology offers a variety of feminine objects including the “Venus figures,” small, clay, obese, and female, some dating back into the Pleistocene, as evidence of an “original” religion with the female as the central deity.¹⁹ Her bulging body is said to represent pregnancy or prosperity, but the worship of fecundity and superabundance is an agricultural monomania. Advocates of a Great Mother, Earth Mother, or “Lady of the Beasts” argue that she is older than a goddess of agriculture, “bringing culture and manners,” but close to “the wild, early nature of humankind,” to the “instinct-governed being who lived with the beasts and the freegrowing plants.” But this notion of the savage’s instinct-dominated personality and crude life prior to towns was an eighteenth-century invention, a fantasy of urban disaffection, the civilized idea of prehistory as a nightmare. Belief that primitive people were mentally childlike led psychiatrists, classicists, and others to assert that the goddess “who governs the animal world and dominates instinct and drives, who gathers the beasts beneath her spirit wings,” represented a “matriarchal” phase in history. Yet there is no good evidence that our Pleistocene ancestors, although they most likely viewed the earth as mother, worshiped a Great Mother deity in the form of a woman. Such figures emerged with agriculture, and the idealized image of the fecund female was projected onto nature and centered the ego on controlling nature in the form of a governing deity.

The foraging cultures that venerated nature, on the other hand, were radically different from those that replaced them during the past ten

thousand years, including those venerating goddesses or gods and thereby denying humanity. Throughout the twentieth century there has been a continuing debate about the meaning of Paleolithic paintings and etchings, primarily of animals in the caves of France and Spain. Speaking of the paintings estimated to be twenty thousand years old discovered in the Grotte Chauvet in France in 1994, Meg Conkey, specialist in Paleolithic art, says: “Cro-Magnon’s world was an intensely animated world. . . . They had reindeer in their stomachs, but rhinos on their minds. . . . They were painting the animals that were good to think a bestiary of symbolically important animals.”²⁰ These were not dogs, chickens, or milch cows but wild, free beings who owned the world as much as the hunters themselves, and in whose great beauty *Homo sapiens* had discovered a mirror of the best of human qualities.

Two dozen corpulent, Paleolithic “Venus” statuettes hardly compare to the thousands of animal drawings or the etched figures in stone and abstract signs accompanying them. Everything known about hunter/gatherers of the Pleistocene and the present refutes Levy-Bruhl’s first analysis of the Franco-Cantabrian cave art as “fertility magic.” The little figurines may signify a collective sensitivity to a quality that could be characterized as feminine, but only as one of many aspects—not as the holy of holies in the figure of a woman. In farming, the womanly representation of feminine productivity became an appropriate model of the generative, nurturing, and renewing processes; but even in Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of 5,300 to 10,000 years ago she is still part of a mélange of snakes, cattle, and birds. The Great Goddess has much to do with agriculture; but neither she nor agriculture represents the primal, psychologically mature stage in human evolution. She may, however, have become the numinousness of the world through the eyes of a regressive, immature society that had lost the vision of themselves as counterplayers in a vast cosmos of other species or “peoples,” a society that had become instead the caretakers of seeds and livestock much as they themselves had been nurtured by their mothers.

THE COMPLEX WEB OF SKILLS and knowledge of the hunters and gatherers is translated into a fluid design of social interaction as well as an all-encompassing cosmology that speaks to a rich spiritual life lived in the shadow of death. Hunters are engaged in a game of chance amid heterogeneous, exemplary powers rather than collective strategies of accumulation and control. They never play it as “maximizing your take.” Their metaphysics conceives a living, sentient, and diverse comity whose main features are given in narrations that are outside History. Their mood is assent and affirmation of their circumstances. Their lives are committed to the understanding of a vast semiosis, presented to them on every side, in which they are not only readers but members. The hunt becomes a kind of search gestalt. The lifelong test and theme is “learning to give away” what was a gift received in the first place—life itself—a theme demonstrated daily in the sharing of meat.

NOTES

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4. Ibid.
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12. C. H. D. Clarke, "Venator the Hunter," unpublished manuscript, n.d. *How the Mind Once Lived* 65
13. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting* (New York: Scribner's, 1972), pp. 141–142.
14. Nurit Bird-David, "The Giving Environment," *Current Anthropology* 31 (2) (1990): 189–196.
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16. Richard Nelson, *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 225–231.
17. See Wilhelm Dupre, *Religion in Primitive Cultures: A Study in Ethnophilosophy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 206, referring to Kaj Birket-Smith, *Die Eskimos* (Zurich, 1948).
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19. Marija Gimbutus, *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
20. Meg Conkey quoted by Virginia Morell, "Stone Age Menagerie," *Audubon*, May–June 1995, p. 54.